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Volume 14 Special Issue: What Works? The use of a social networking site with pre-enrolled Business School students to enhance their first year experience at university, and in doing so, improve retention.

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Abstract

A Social Networking Site was explored as a medium for forging early links with students entering a UK University Business School within the North-West region. A Facebook page was specifically created for pre –enrolment contact with students coming to study on one of six pre-identified ‘retention hotspot’ courses within the department. Students firmly accepted offers to study on these courses in August 2011 and from this point, forthcoming students were invited to join the Facebook page. The Facebook page, alongside being informative, introduced forthcoming students to their prospective course mates as well as to the department, university and city. This pre-enrolment contact via Facebook aimed to engender students’ sense of belonging and facilitate social integration, not just to the student group but on a departmental level too. Sense of belonging and social integration are frequently highlighted in the literature as issues pertaining to student retention. An evaluation revealed positive feedback from the students about the Facebook page who reported that it helped to build friendships and networks earlier, faster and easier thus ultimately facilitating social integration and feelings of belonging. Figures revealed that students who were members of the Facebook page experienced higher levels of retention than non-Facebook page members.

Key Words: Student retention and success; feelings of belonging; student experience; social networking.

Introduction

Retention is a fundamental issue for all educational institutions and the changes taking place in the higher education sector mean that student retention and success is all the more crucial (Thomas 2012). Existing literature into this area highlights a strong association between a sense of belonging and feeling integrated with retention and success (Tinto 1975; Bers & Smith 1991; Braunstein et al. 2006; Longden 2006; Jeffreys 2007; Yorke & Longden 2008; Bennett & Kane 2010; Harding 2011; Thomas 2012). Given the importance of social integration and a sense of belonging to the fundamental issue of student retention, this study sought to explore the use of the social networking site Facebook to develop these important elements in first year university students. In doing this, the overall aim was to improve student retention and success in these cohorts.

The use of Facebook was explored as a medium for engendering social integration, aiding transition to university and then monitoring these students throughout their first year at university. The use of Facebook in this way was trialled with students entering their first year of a programme within the business school at a university in the North-West region of the UK. Six programmes were specifically targeted which are currently retention hotspot courses i.e. these programmes have been pre-identified as having high rates of attrition; Accounting,

Accounting & Finance; Business Administration; Business and Management, Business & Marketing and Business Studies.

Given that student retention and success is an important issue for all institutions and the literature into student retention strongly attributes a sense of belonging and feeling integrated socially and academically paramount in improving student retention rates, this project set out to research these issues further. This paper therefore discusses a pilot study which aimed to facilitate students' social integration and feelings of belonging via the social networking site Facebook. Facebook was used with pre-enrolled university students to attempt to start student social integration from an earlier stage which commenced the month prior to students starting at university. It was hoped that forging these early links would ultimately improve student retention rates over their first year of university.

Literature Review

Student Belonging and Social Integration

According to Thomas (2012), student belonging involves both academic and social belonging. It links with students' feelings of acceptance, inclusion, fitting in and being valued. Deconstructing a sense of belonging further, Hoffman et al. (2002) identify two types of belonging; 'student-to-peer' and 'student-to-faculty'. Students can therefore feel a sense of belonging to other students and consequently feel as though they belong to a student group. In addition, students can also build an attachment to the department and staff and feel as though they belong to the departmental community. A feeling of belonging can therefore aid student attachment, engagement and improve attitudes towards university life, hence why it has significance to student retention and success.

A lack of sense of belonging is amongst one of the reasons why a student withdraws from university (Thomas 2012; Tinto's 1975; Quinn et al 2005). Qualitative data from the seven projects which comprised the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme, reported that feelings of isolation and not fitting in were amongst fundamental reasons why a student would contemplate leaving university (Thomas 2012). Tinto's (1975) model asserts that students who engage in formal and informal academic and social integration experiences are less likely to leave their institution. Encouraging students to engage and take up these social integration experiences is therefore recommended. This encouragement should also occur early on in a student's time at university to help connect students from an early stage and facilitate feelings of belongs to the student cohort and department. This early intervention could provide students with an approachable peer and staff support network along with helping students to feel valued, engaged, dedicated and motivated. All of these elements contribute towards retaining students (Osterman, 2000; Schofield & Dismore 2010).

Work undertaken by Dorum et al. (2010) ascertained that student's value feelings of belonging to their institution or department. They surveyed 370 year 1 students who revealed that 'the intimacy of the institution and its staff' was of significant importance to the higher education experience. This openness of the institution and staff enhances student feelings of belonging and social integration which results in students' increased academic motivation (Thomas 2002). The more motivated students are, the more likely they are to approach tutors about problems which if left, could ultimately lead to student withdrawal.

However, a major obstacle in facilitating social integration and a sense of belonging is an increasing trend for students to live at home rather than live on campus. Research conducted

in the 1970s identified that students place of residence has a high bearing upon student involvement, interaction and retention (Astin 1984). Astin's (1984) research showed that students who lived in halls of residence became more embedded into university life and formed stronger attachments and identification to the institution compared to those students who did not live on campus.

Recent trends show that increasing numbers of students are opting to live off campus and instead commute into university. Data from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) demonstrates that in the mid-1980s on average 8 per cent of undergraduate students lived at home. This figure has amplified over the decades and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE 2009) reported that the number of students living at home rose to around 20% during the mid-2000s. This 20% figure has remained constant over recent years with HESA reporting that 19% of the 2010/11 full-time and sandwich degree students declared their term time address as their parental or guardian home. This figure however, is for those studying on a full time basis and does not include part time students.

As early research by Astin (1984) demonstrates however, those students who stay at home and commute into university encounter more barriers to engaging and are less likely to develop forms of attachment. This ultimately impacts upon student retention rates. The students who opt to stay at home pose an interesting conundrum for those seeking to increase retention rates via means of social integration and feelings of belonging. Research by the University of Liverpool found that those students who lived at home engaged less in university social activities when compared to their campus residence counterparts. Whilst the research reveals that students compensate by engaging in more non-university activities, students who live at home face more difficulties in making friends, integrating with university culture, feelings of belonging and overall general engagement in university life. The research concludes therefore that living at home can have a detrimental effect on student social integration (Patiniotis & Holdsworth 2005).

A tool for bridging the gap experienced by students who do not live on campus with those who do live on campus, is the use of social media to enhance feelings of belonging and social integration.

Social Media

Provided by the platform of web 2.0 technology, social media applications allow for the creation and exchange of information not just from individuals but by communities developing content in a participatory fashion (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Social media encompasses a range of sites and services which *"employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, cocreate, discuss, and modify user-generated content"* (Kietzmann et al 2011, p241). These sites and services include wikis, blogs, social networking sites and virtual worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010) with Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, YouTube and Flickr amongst some of the most well-known social media sites.

Social networking sites (SNS) are therefore only one component of social media, however they are very popular. The overall focus of SNS are to connect and build online communities which share common activities, interests and goals (Kluemper & Rosen 2009) and the number of user's demonstrate how popular SNS are. In September 2012, the SNS Facebook reported its billionth active member (Fowler 2012). Facebook was launched in 2004 with the following mission statement; *"Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected"* (Key Facts about Facebook 2012). The news that

Facebook has hit the milestone of one billion monthly active members is a significant indicator of the popularity of this social networking site and equates to a ratio of 1 in 7 people in the world actively using Facebook (Kiss 2012). Google is the only other form of social media which has hit a billion monthly visitors and it took Google 13 years to achieve this breakthrough; something which Facebook has achieved in 8 (Fowler 2012). Within the western world Facebook is now the current SNS of choice (Sparkes 2011).

The other interesting element about this SNS is that Facebook users are getting younger with the average age of a Facebook user today standing at 22 years old compared to 23 years in previous years (Fowler 2012). As Facebook membership continues to increase, particular in the young adult categories, Facebook was seen as a potential medium to forge links with students entering into higher education. "*Facebook simplifies the process of managing a large network of connections*" (Lampe et al 2011, p330) and within a university context that becomes very beneficial. Students are able to connect to and communicate with large numbers of course mates through a variety of informal methods which Facebook facilitate (private message, instant message, public posts, status up-dates and group communications). Due to the personal profile nature of Facebook, students are able to easily find out about their course mates and find those with similar interests and outlooks. Research shows that university students respond well Facebook and it is popular with this cohort (Kord 2008).

Research conducted in America by the Whittemore School of Business and Economics at the University of New Hampshire found that Facebook was the most popular source of social media their students used (96% of their students used this SNS). The second most popular form of social media was YouTube, followed by online blogs, Twitter, MySpace and finally LinkedIn (Martin 2009). This trend is supported by the work of others. Roblyer et al. (2010) found that 95% of students at an American university had a Facebook account and therefore this was one of the most popular social media forms used. The high numbers of students interacting with social media is not only seen in America, as Khan (2009) reports; "*about 83 per cent of British 16 to 24-year-olds are thought to use social networking sites*, which includes Facebook. More recently Silver Bean (2012) cited findings from the 2012 Youth Insight Report who had surveyed UK students on a wide range of issues including social media. It was found that Facebook again was the most popular form of social media amongst this age group with an average 97% of UK students using this networking site. As Facebook therefore is such a popular choice amongst university students, there is a significant argument for universities using this medium with their students.

Universities use of social networking sites with their students is no longer a new occurrence but it is still building momentum. Citing recent research undertaken by Mashable in the United States, McCann (2012) reported that higher education institutions globally were using social media to some extent which included Facebook, Twitter and online blogs. Similarly this trend can be seen in the UK higher education sector (McCann 2012).

Whilst the use of social media with students is commonplace, the researching of this activity is still an emerging area and therefore only some literature is available. Bartle et al. (2010) specifically looked at the use of Facebook with students living off campus to aid their sense of belonging. The authors reported that those students living off-campus who used Facebook to make friends online reported a higher sense of belonging when compared to their other off-campus peers who had not used Facebook. Bartle et al. (2010) concluded from their study that student sense of belonging and social integration can be increased by using a SNS such as Facebook.

Similarly, Madge et al. (2009) surveyed students about their use of Facebook prior to and during their first year at university. Findings from this survey confirmed that students originally joined Facebook to make new friends before coming to university and to maintain existing friendships. Madge et al. (2009:144) concluded that *“it is clear therefore that Facebook was an important social tool used by the majority of the respondents to aid transition to university.”*

These studies indicate an apparent potential for developing the use of SNS's such as Facebook with university students to enhance the student experience. However, research also exists to support the negative aspects of SNS with university students. Research undertaken by Kord (2008) found both negative and positive aspects to using SNS. Her research found that SNS negatively influenced the academic experience of students by causing problems with academic and intellectual development. However, the research also found that the use of SNS did influence student retention rates. The research shows therefore that the current literature is inconclusive and uncertainty remains over the positive and negative aspects that can arise out of facilitating online social networking with university students when trying to engender integration and feelings of belonging. Madge et al (2009) has also advocated that this area remains under-researched and under-developed and concluded that more research is needed to ascertain the links between social media and students sense of belonging and integration;

“Whilst recent studies suggest that over 95% of British undergraduate students are regularly using social networking sites, we still know very little about how this phenomenon impacts on the student experience and, in particular, how it influences students’ social integration into university life”

Madge et al (2009, p141)

Whilst only a small amount of research is available regarding the use of SNS amongst current university students, there is even less literature offered on student use of SNS prior to starting university (Madge et al. 2009). The purpose of this project was to contribute towards this gap in the knowledge and ascertain whether a students’ sense of belonging can be increased by using Facebook pre-enrolment and if so, does this an effect upon student retention.

Research Objective

The objective of this research was to explore the use of Facebook with pre-enrolled business students as a way to forge early links and in doing so engender a student’s sense of belonging and facilitate social integration. To meet this objective, the following research questions were set out:

1. Is Facebook a viable method to forge links with students prior to starting university?
2. Does Facebook aid student social integration and feelings of belonging?
3. Can Facebook effectively improve student retention rates?

By answering these questions, it is hoped that the research will be able to contribute towards the current literature in the field of using SNS with students to enhance their feelings of belonging and social integration. In addition, to add to the literature in the area of SNS and how these can be used as a student retention and success method is also of particular value.

Method

The Sample

The targeted sample were those students coming to a North West England University to study their first year on a retention hotspot undergraduate programme within the Business School; Accounting, Accounting & Finance; Business Administration; Business and Management, Business & Marketing and Business Studies. These undergraduate programmes had been pre-identified as having problems pertaining to retention and success. This study was undertaken over the academic year 2011-12 and across these six first year programmes over this academic year there were a total of 588 students.

The Facebook Page

In July 2011 a Facebook page was specifically created for students coming to study their first year on a retention hotspot programme. Firstly a Facebook page was created and then associated groups were formed for specific courses e.g. all students would be invited to become a member of the Facebook page, but those who would be studying the Business and Marketing programme would be added to the Business and Marketing group. This enabled pre-enrolled students to see the other students who would also be starting on the same course. This was to assist pre-enrolled students in meeting other pre-enrolled students in a virtual environment prior to arriving on campus, thus encouraging early social integration.

In August 2012, once students had confirmed their offer to study one of these six programmes in the business school, pre-enrolled students were sent an email inviting them to join the Facebook page. Upon joining the Facebook page students were then assigned to the relevant associated group.

The Facebook page itself was designed to be informative and contained a variety of photograph albums to browse and links to relevant websites in addition to a wide range of university and departmental information posted on the pages. The page was updated regularly to keep the information current and timely. Students were able to post questions on the page and in the groups, initiate conversations and contribute to discussions.

The Facebook page (and associated groups) was a closed and private page whereby students had to either be invited or had to request (and wait for acceptance) to join the page. Without this initial approval, students could not see the content of the page nor its members. This form of gate keeping was employed purposefully to facilitate the management, monitoring and control of the site and ensured only the targeted students joined the page.

The Facebook page was monitored daily and therefore questions and queries could be answered swiftly. Discussions with other students also enabled real time conversations between peers. Content was endeavoured to be posted daily to keep the Facebook page a source of fresh and new information with new issues to read and discuss. Daily monitoring also involved the checking and observing of student discussions and posts to ensure nothing malicious or untoward was posted on the Facebook page and groups.

The Evaluation

An evaluation survey was distributed to the Facebook users at the end of semester one in January 2012. This 21 item questionnaire contained both open and closed questions and sought answers to questions such as; what were student views of the Facebook page? How often and in what capacity did students use the page? Did the Facebook page help students to make friends and connections? Did the Facebook page enhance students' feelings of belonging? For more details of the evaluation questionnaire please see appendix 1.

Descriptive statistics and cross tabulation was used in the analysis of the evaluation survey data and the results of which are discussed below.

Results and Discussion

Upon contacting students in August 2011 about the Facebook page, 160 of the 588 students coming to study one of the six retention hotspot programmes took up the option to join the Facebook page. Of these 160 students, 36 students completed an evaluation questionnaire at the end of semester 1 (resulting in a 22.5% response rate). The findings of this questionnaire will be detailed below in accordance with the research questions.

The research questions will now be re-visited and the results will be broken down to answer and discuss each question in turn:

1. Is Facebook a viable method to forge links with students prior to starting university?
2. Does Facebook aid student social integration and feelings of belonging?
3. Can Facebook effectively improve student retention rates?

1. Is Facebook a viable method to forge links with students prior to starting university?

In total, 160 students across the six retention hotspot courses joined the Facebook page. The total number of students comprising the six year 1 retention hotspot courses equated to 588 students. Overall therefore, only 27% of the students coming to study one of the six retention hotspot programmes took up the option to join the Facebook page.

Of the 160 students who did take up the opportunity to join the Facebook page, 89% were already a member of Facebook before coming to university. This figure is similar to the figure reported by Khan that 83% of British 16-24yr olds use social networking sites such as Facebook. The remaining 11% of this sample joined Facebook when they came to university.

As the majority of pre-enrolled students were existing members of Facebook and already used this SNS, this supports that Facebook was worth pursuing as a medium for forging early links with forthcoming students.

As results showed that students were familiar with Facebook and most already used this form of media, the low take up from students to join the University Facebook page needed further consideration. Firstly, due to limitations of the researcher's time, only one Facebook page invite was sent to students. Had follow up reminder invites been sent out, take-up may have improved. Secondly, the name of the Facebook page was the acronym of the business school. Many students were unfamiliar with the name of the business school in this shortened form and therefore may not have realised what this Facebook page was for and hence reluctant to join or accept the invite of an unknown entity. Thirdly the gatekeeping of the

Facebook page could have had a detrimental effect. Instead of a more easily accessible open page, approval was needed before joining this Facebook page some students may have held some trepidation about requesting to join the page. The final consideration lies in a possibility that students simply did not want to join the departmental Facebook page.

2. Does Facebook aid student social integration and feelings of belonging?

Firstly, students were asked how they engaged with the Facebook page and were provided with three types of engagement to select from; watching, reactively and proactively. The majority of students (71% of the sample) reported that they engaged with the page by 'watching' i.e. the student does not make posts, but instead uses the page to watch and read other conversations, posts and information. The next most frequent way to engage with the Facebook page was 'reactively' in which 21% of the students did. This involved students responding to posts, conversations and friendship requests, but they did not initiate these. Finally, the least common way to engage with the Facebook page was 'proactively'. Only 8% of the students reported that they were proactive in initiating posts, conversations and friend making.

Although only a small minority of students used the page proactively, the majority of students did report that they mainly used the page to view people on their course followed next by reading the information to learn about the university and the business school. Even though many students did not create posts, contribute towards discussions or initiate friendships, most students did use the page to view the other students coming on to their course. Students highlighted that the ability to view others coming onto their course meant there was significant gains to be made from being a member of the Facebook page. Students reported that this gave them comfort and reassurance to see other people in the same position as them which is demonstrated in these student quotes:

"It was good to see people on your course and helped me feel calmer about starting"

"I could see who else would be on my course. You are alongside others on your course".

"The opportunity to see others new to the business school"

"From the comments you slowly realise everyone's in the same boat"

Being a member of the Facebook page, irrespective of the type of engagement undertaken, alleviated for many students their feelings of isolation and nervousness before starting university by seeing that other students had the same worries and were in the same situation.

Students were then asked about their propensity for making friends as a result of being a member of the Facebook page. Of the sample, 38% spoke to course mates before starting classes at university, 25% met up with course mates before starting classes and 50% reported that they made friends with people on their course quicker than if they were not a member of the Facebook page. The student quotes below describe how some students made friends as a result of being a member of the Facebook page:

"The page was the main reason I have the group of friends that I do now. We were all in the same boat - knew nobody. We were able to meet before the course started and stick together when we were lost around uni" Business and Management student

"I met friends through the page that I was able to exchange contact details with and meet on our first day at uni" Business and Marketing student

“I made friends with one person on my course through the page, the only person that I knew on the course, so it made the first day a lot easier and I made my current friends through that person” Accounting and Finance student.

These findings support the research undertaken by Madge et al. (2009) who found that students used Facebook to make new friends before coming to university and to maintain existing friendships. The findings here, again similar to Madge et al. (2009), support that friendships formed via the social network site enabled a smoother transition into university life.

However, the Facebook page did not benefit everyone in this way. Whilst all students reported that they could view course mates, not all students were able to use this facility to make friends:

“It didn’t really help me but that’s because I am very nervous when making new friends so I didn’t speak to anyone on my course before starting”. Accounting and Finance student

Students were asked outright if the Facebook page had helped them to feel like they belonged to a group. Overall, 69.5% of the students either strongly agreed or agreed that being a member of the Facebook page made them feel like they belonged to a group. As discussed in the literature review, it is well documented that a strong association between feelings of belonging and social integration with retention and success exists (Tinto 1975; Bers & Smith 1991; Braunstein et al. 2006; Longden 2006; Jeffreys 2007; Yorke & Longden 2008; Bennett & Kane 2010; Harding 2011; Thomas 2012). If the majority of students are therefore reporting that engaging with the Facebook page helped them to feel like they belonged, this should hopefully contribute to those students being retained. However, this may not be the case for the remaining 30.5% of students in this sample who did not strongly agree or agree that being a member of the Facebook page made them feel like they belonged to a group. For the sizeable minority, the Facebook page has not enhanced social integration or feelings of belonging.

Deconstructing further the sense of belonging data, table 1 illustrates how place of residence impacts upon the feelings of belonging gained from joining the Facebook page.

Table 1. Place of Residence and Feelings of Belonging

The Facebook page enabled me to feel like I belonged to a group	Where do you currently live? (%)		
	Parental home	University halls of residence	Private rented accommodation
Strongly Agree	18	0	0
Agree	53	33	10
Neutral	24	67	90
Disagree	5	0	0
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0
Totals	100	100	100

As table 1 above shows, 71% of students living off campus in the parental home either strongly agreed or agreed that being a member of the Facebook page enabled them to feel like they belonged to a group. This figure is significantly higher than the 33% of students living in university halls of residence and 10% of students living in private rented accommodation

who either strongly agreed or agreed to this statement. These figures support the findings of Bartle et al. (2010) in that students living in the parental home benefit more from the Facebook page in making friends and developing feelings of belonging.

The trend of students living in the parental home benefiting more from the Facebook page than those who do not live in the parental home supports the findings from Astin (1984) and Patiniotis & Holdsworth (2005). These authors found that students who do not live on campus face more barriers to engaging and therefore living at home can have a detrimental effect on student social integration. The students who live on campus and do not encounter such barriers possibly do not need to engage in social media the same and therefore do not reap the same level of benefit. Perhaps therefore, students who live on campus make friends and gain feelings of belonging with housemates and therefore have less of a need for online communities such as the Facebook page. On average, 51% of the students across the 6 business school retention hotspot courses live at home and commute into university. This figure is much higher than the 20% figure offered by HESA and HEFCE and would therefore support a heightened need for an online provision, such as the Facebook page, to assist in engendering feelings of belonging in those high numbers of students living in the parental home.

Overall, the Facebook page has been beneficial in engendering its members' feelings of belonging. The work of Thomas (2012) highlights that students feeling of belonging links with feelings of inclusion, fitting in and being valued. Student comments reflect that the Facebook page helped them to realise that all students were feeling how they were feeling and therefore shared a commonality in their situations. This coupled with the ability for many students to make friends and connections with their prospective course mates may have enabled students to feel as though they 'fitted in' from an earlier stage. The work of Hoffman et al. (2002) emphasised two different types of belonging; 'student-to-peer' and 'student-to-faculty'. Whilst the belonging to a student group was highlighted as a benefit by the students using the Facebook page, little was mentioned about obtaining a feeling of belonging to the department. The focus from this research mostly centred on student attachment and engagement with other students, rather than specifically becoming attached to the department. Nonetheless, on the whole, the majority of students found being a member of the Facebook page beneficial in facilitating making friends and thus enhanced social integration and their feelings of belonging.

3. Can Facebook effectively improve student retention rates?

Of the 160 students who were members of the Facebook page, 158 have been retained during their first year resulting in a 1.3% attrition rate. In comparison to the six year 1 retention hotspot courses in total which experienced a 6.4% attrition rate over the first year. These figures therefore suggest that students on the retention hotspot courses who were members of the Facebook page were more likely to be retained than those students on the same retention hotspot courses who were not members of the Facebook page. In answering the research question therefore, Facebook membership does have an association with lower attrition rates.

Further considerations must be made as to why the Facebook page users had better retention rates than non-Facebook page users. Firstly, the sample size is small and if larger numbers had taken up the Facebook page, the retention figures may have differed. Another consideration is that only the more engaged students became members of the Facebook page and these students were more likely to be retained anyway. For example, the course

representatives were amongst the members on the Facebook page and these students are generally more engaged students and therefore less likely to withdraw. However, the high number of students who reported in the survey that they were 'watchers' and therefore not active engagers, means that many of the Facebook students may not have been the most engaged students. As the Facebook page facilitated students either speaking, meeting or just viewing course mates before starting classes at university, this helped students make friends quicker and these friendship could well be why student retention rates of the Facebook members was higher.

Conclusion

Whilst some research exists into the use of SNS with current university students, little research exists into the use of SNS with pre-enrolled students. This research project aimed to fill this gap and ascertain a deeper understanding about pre-enrolled students use and benefits from engaging with a university department Facebook page. It was hoped that by engaging with the Facebook page, students would start to socially integrate from an earlier stage (i.e. pre-enrolment) and this would lead to students developing a deeper sense of belonging which would ultimately improve retention.

The evaluation survey revealed that overall students were very pleased with the Facebook page, experienced many benefits of being a member of this page and would recommend it to new students starting next year. The main benefit was social networking and being able to view and make connections with other students commencing on the same course prior to the start of semester 1 at university. It was the pre-enrolment contact which was of significant importance to the students, this allowed them to view others who would be on their course and in many instances enable them to speak to and meet the fellow course mates before the first day of university. The Facebook page helped to build friendships and networks faster and easier thus ultimately facilitating social integration and feelings of belonging.

This research indicates that the use of SNS can contribute towards student retention which is largely attributed to the social networking element and making friends with peers. Whilst further research would be needed into developing a sense of belonging to the department, the Facebook page has been deemed a success in facilitating a sense of belonging to a student group.

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Appendix 1: The Facebook Evaluation Questionnaire

LBS Facebook Evaluation

The 'LBS Uclan' Facebook page was specifically created for first year students coming into LBS in September 2011. We would like to know your views on this page and how we can develop this further for you over the year and for future new students starting next year.

About you

Course: _____

Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

Residence: _____ Home (UK) _____ European _____ International

Term Time Accommodation :

_____ University Halls _____ Private rented _____ Parental home

Are you a member of Facebook:

_____ Yes, I became a member when I came to university

_____ Yes, I was a member before coming to university

 No

Joining the Facebook Page

How did you become a friend of ‘LBS Uclan’?

_____ I had a friend request from them on Facebook

_____ I received an email inviting me to join

Through a mutual friend

Other (please specify) _____

When did you become friends with ‘LBS Uclan’ on Facebook?

_____ August

September

October

_____ I don't remember

Using the 'LBS Uclan' Facebook page

How do you use the 'LBS Uclan' Facebook page? Would you say you mostly engaged:

- ☐ Proactively (i.e. you initiate posts, conversations, friendships etc)
- ☐ Reactively (i.e. you respond to posts, conversations and friendship requests, but you don't initiate these)
- ☐ Lurking (i.e. you don't make posts, but instead use the page to read other posts and conversations)
- ☐ Other. Please specify _____

What have you used the 'LBS Uclan' Facebook page for? (Please tick all that apply)

I used the 'LBS Uclan' Facebook page to:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> View people on my course | <input type="checkbox"/> View the photographs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contact people on my course | <input type="checkbox"/> Ask questions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn about the Business School | <input type="checkbox"/> Request information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Meet other people new to LBS | <input type="checkbox"/> Contact staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn about the university | <input type="checkbox"/> Read the information |

Transition to University

How did you feel about starting university? (E.g. nervous, excited etc) _____

Do you feel becoming friends with 'LBS Uclan' made you feel better about starting university?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Do not know

Please comment:

Do you feel becoming friends with ‘LBS Uclan’ gave you a better idea of what to expect about starting at university?

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Do not know

Please comment:

Do you feel becoming friends with ‘LBS Uclan’ gave you a better idea of what to expect about starting at university?

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Do not know

Please comment:

Views on the ‘LBS Uclan’ Facebook page

What do you like about the ‘LBS Uclan’ Facebook page:

What do you dislike about the ‘LBS Uclan’ Facebook page:

How much do you agree with the following statements:

The Facebook page.....	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
was informative					
prepared me for starting in LBS					
helped me make friends					
informed me about relevant events					
contained information I was interested in					
was easy to use					

Would you recommend the 'LBS Uclan' Facebook page to students starting next year?

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Do not know

Please comment:

Making friends through the 'LBS Uclan' Facebook page

How much do you agree with the following statements:

The 'LBS Uclan' Facebook Page enabled me to.....	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<i>Speak to</i> course mate before starting classes at university					
<i>Meet with</i> course mates before starting classes at university					
Make friends with people on my course earlier					
Helped me to socialise with course mates					
Feel like I belonged to a group					
Make friends and socialise easier than if I weren't a member of the page					

Please comment on how the ‘LBS Uclan’ Facebook page helped (or did not help) you to make friends with other students in the department:

How do you feel your experiences would have differed if there was no ‘LBS Uclan’ Facebook Page:

Future use of the ‘LBS Uclan’ Facebook Page

Please make suggestions on how the ‘LBS Uclan’ Facebook Page could be improved?

Many thanks for completing this survey.